

Cultural Patrimony of the Roman Catholic Church

Roy Eugene Graham

The Roman Catholic Church, arguably the owner of more historic properties than any other institution in the world, has not always been successful in preserving them. It is now providing leadership and a model for other religious groups in recognizing the importance of identifying and protecting cultural resources. After a groundswell of interest in preservation on the part of the Vatican—accompanied and spurred on by the enthusiasm of such people as

Monsignor Michael di Teccia Farina, the Vatican's representative to the 8th General Assembly of the International Council of Monuments and Sites in 1987, and the President of the Paul VI Institute for the Arts in Washington, DC—a new Pontifical Commission to identify and protect the properties of the church was formed. Monsignor Farina, along with others, felt a world-wide effort was necessary. Pope John Paul II agreed and the Commission for the Preservation of the Artistic and Historical Patrimony of the Church was formed. In 1989, the Pope announced that he had directed Bishop Francesco Marchisano to organize the Commission with the general purpose of making the clergy and the laity more aware of the importance and necessity of preserving the Church's vast historic resources. These concerns actually reflected those of the international community when it created the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) after World War II. UNESCO's goal was the development or enrichment of each nation's awareness of their cultural identities. At that time various nations as well as the Vatican itself instituted ministries for the protection and valorization of works of architecture, art, and other aspects of culture. The Ministry for Cultural Patrimony of the Church, the forerunner to the new Commission, was instituted in Italy in 1974 and the constitution enacted by Vatican II dedicated an entire chapter to sacred art and architecture.

The goals of the new Commission, enumerated by Bishop Marchisano, are: (1) to educate the church community...[on the value of the] conservation and preservation of the cultural heritage; (2) to promote the cultural heritage as a primary means of evangelization; (3) to underline the role of art and architecture in transmitting the faith; and, (4) to support the preservation and conservation of ecclesiastical archives and libraries. Bishops throughout the world have been asked to send reports to the new Pontifical Commission on the activities conducted in the preservation field in their dioceses and to maintain constant communication with persons and organizations in charge of cultural patrimony. The Commission was set up not only to encourage the ecclesiastic community to be more responsible guardians of its cultural properties but to promote cooperation between the Roman Catholic Church and government agencies.

To accomplish its mission, the Commission has called upon universities such as the Vatican-chartered Catholic

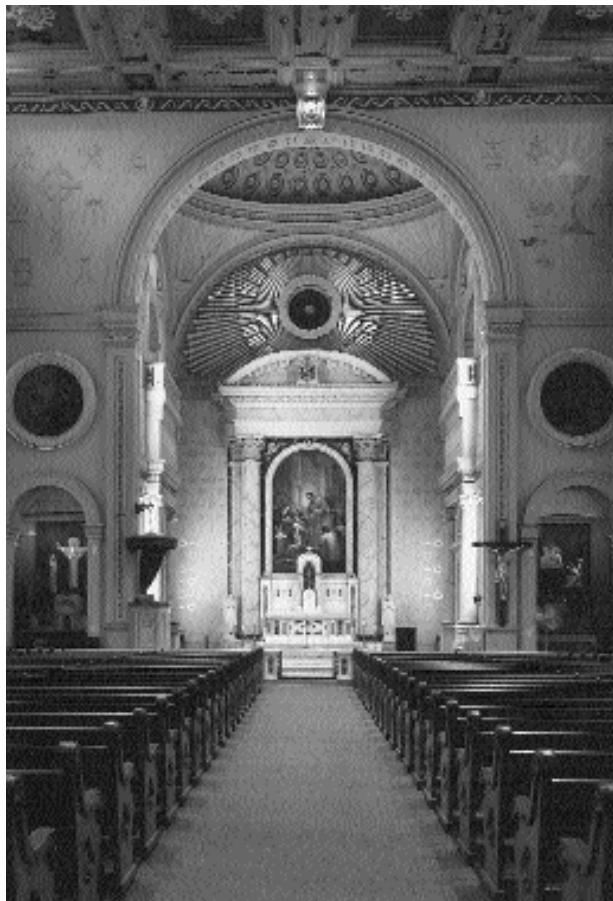
University of America in Washington, DC to integrate their activities with the art world and the field of conservation. The School of Architecture at Catholic University has marshaled students and faculty to encourage the preservation of historic properties. In responding to the Commission, the School of Architecture has added the preservation of Catholic properties to programs and courses in: historic preservation, preservation-oriented design studios, preservation field work, a preservation intern program, and extensive existing programs in sacred and religious art and architecture.

The School of Architecture will soon solicit funds to begin a systematic planning project to locate and record all Catholic properties of cultural value in the country. After the study identifies and develops planning strategies, it will define preservation needs for each property identified, provide additional documentation (such as HABS-type drawings), organize projects geographically, and determine the format of the final report (using a computer database). In addition to field inventories and

appraisals, teams would locate and identify archival materials such as historic drawings, measured drawings, and photographs. There undoubtedly are also possibilities for oral histories and personal interviews.

In order to begin this important study, the School of Architecture has already sought the cooperation and

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Placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973, St. Aloysius Roman Catholic Church on North Capitol Street in Washington, DC, was built between 1857 and 1859. Designed by an Italian Jesuit architect, its impressive interior is now undergoing renovation. The church is also noteworthy for its sanctuary paintings by Constantino Brumidi, who is best known for his frescoes in the dome of the US Capitol.



Fig. 4. Sculptures of the blessed Queen Kinga (the legendary “foundress” of the mine) and knights and miners, Wieliczka Salt Mine. Photo by R.P. Hosker, NOAA (February 1992).

Chapel about 50 m below the surface, pollutant levels are negligible. Although sulfate particles are accumulating on sculptural and wall surfaces, there is no evidence of a lower deliquescence point that would require a target RH much lower than 73%.

The team designed a microclimate control system for the Wieliczka Salt Mine based on cooling and dehumidifying air entering the mine during the summer, using a commercially available air-conditioning system mounted adjacent to or within the mine entrance building. Once this system is operational, the path of the air flow through St. Anthony’s Chapel can be modified to improve the ventilation at the site of greatest sculptural damage as necessary. A summary of the technical effort is being prepared in Polish and English for distribution to visitors to the Wieliczka Salt Mine.

Cracow’s collection of Renaissance tapestries, textiles, paintings, and libraries may be at risk from atmospheric chemicals penetrating church and museum interiors. Dustfall in Cracow is about 150,000 tons/year. Newly stuccoed buildings appear dingy in 3-6 months. Particles also soil interior artifacts, and depending on the chemistry, airborne grime can damage museum objects.

The second joint Polish-US project under the auspices of the Marie Curie Fund is investigating the infiltration of pollution into Cracow’s historic buildings and museums, using the same techniques as the pollutant component of the Salt Mine study. The principal participants are A. O’Bright (NPS), Professor G. Cass and L. Salmon (Caltech), Dr. K. Brückman (PAN), and T. Chruscicki, Director of the National Museum in Cracow. The measurements of pollutant chemistry and concentrations inside the Wawel Castle and museums will assist in selecting appropriate protection for sensitive objects. Protection methods might include: (re)design of ventilation systems (including window opening/closing options), increased cleaning schedules, display cases for sensitive materials, controlled storage conditions for especially sensitive materials, etc..

In July 1993, monitors for SO₂, NO_x, ozone, and particle chemistry were installed at Wawel Castle and the Matejko Museum in the Central Cracow World Heritage Site, to be operated for one year. In addition, short term and one-month pollution samples were taken at the Cloth Hall, the

new National Museum, and the Jagiellonian University Museum, which houses Copernicus’ astronomical devices and handpainted globes.

These efforts are coordinated with a pollution monitoring network established as part of a \$25 million initiative by our President in 1989 to protect the cultural heritage of Cracow through environmental improvement. Real progress is being made in pollution control by retrofitting power plants with American emission reduction technology, improving the city’s district heating system, and switching from high sulfur coal to natural gas in residences inside the World Heritage Site. As environmental conditions in southern Poland improve, long-term preservation of historic buildings and monuments in Cracow enters the realm of the possible.

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advice of the National Park Service. With the help of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) and the strong support of Dr. Robert J. Kapsch, Chief of HABS/HAER, the team is accumulating records of buildings recorded by HABS. Using computer scan equipment, this information will be sorted and placed on a database suitable for transmittal to the Pontifical Commission in Rome. With the help of HABS, the University will establish its own criteria for recording properties. In addition, the team has begun to use the resources of the Archdioceses of Washington and Baltimore for information on historic properties. It is expected that many future recording projects will be sponsored by the US National Conference of Catholic Bishops for the express purpose of adding to the inventory of cultural property.

Carol D. Shull, Chief of Registration, National Register of Historic Places, has made the National Park Service’s National Register Information System (NRIS) and archives on registered and eligible structures available to researchers from the School of Architecture at Catholic University. The Service is also participating in the preservation curriculum of the School of Architecture by providing lecturers, professionals for design reviews, material for research, and opportunities for interns.

From these studies the School of Architecture hopes to expand its historic preservation program to include: publications on design guidelines for the maintenance and preservation of historic Roman Catholic properties; projects on the design of new construction compatible with historic structures; development of standards for restorations/rehabilitations; publication of guidelines for fund raising, the disposal of “redundant” property, etc. This comprehensive program could provide the model for other religious denominations in protecting their historic resources.

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